"family" may well also play an important role in whatever causal sequence produces an association between violence viewing and aggression. Unfortunately, however, the available data are limited in scope. In sum, they cannot be said to identify "family" as a common origin third variable; they can rather be said to suggest its candidacy for such a function and to underline the need for further investigation of the role of "family" in this process.

Dominick and Greenberg tested the relative strengths of association between aggressive attitudes and three "antecedent variables," *viz.*, "family attitudes toward violence," "social class," and "exposure to television violence." Their scale of "family attitudes" consisted of seven questions on how children "thought their parents feel about various forms of violence." Because many of the respondents could not provide adequate answers, the group was split into two groups: those whose families were "definitely antiviolence" and those whose parents had not demonstrated disapproval.[2] The failure of families to demonstrate disapproval was found to be more strongly related to aggressive attitudes than was "exposure to television violence" in regard to every attitude scale employed and in regard to both boys and girls. Interpretations of this finding must be tempered by the fact that the child's perception of his family's attitude may tell us more about his attitude than theirs, and by the fact that "exposure to television violence" was found to have some independent relationship with aggressive attitudes.

Within the studies under review, virtually all other data bearing on the relationship of "family" to the association between violence viewing and aggression are found in McLeod et al. (1971a and 1971b). Neither the considerable number of pertinent variables treated by these investigators nor the extensive data thereby generated can be adequately treated within this summary report. Suffice it here to say that all of the variables were measured by indices composed of several questions, and that in reference to several such indices the replies of the youth and their parents are combined.[3]

Two of these variables, "parental control over television viewing" and "parental interpretation of television violence," cannot be regarded as "common origin candidates" in and of themselves, but could conceivably be manifestations of more general aspects of child rearing. Furthermore, they bear directly upon violence viewing. One of these,

[2]These definitions will be found in Dominick and Greenberg (1971). Tables refer to the two groups as "low approval" and "undefined" respectively.

[3]More specifically, McLeod et al. (1971a) employed a sample of Maryland youth and a sample of Wisconsin youth. McLeod et al. (1971b) dealt more fully with the same Wisconsin sample, but did not deal with the Maryland sample. The measures in McLeod et al. (1971b) are in many cases refined as compared with similarly named measures in the earlier study. These more refined measures are, where possible, used in this summary. The use of the less refined measures, when available for parallel inquiries, would in general either present a weaker case or would not appreciably change the thrust of the data.

"parental control over television viewing," was found to bear virtually no relationship to the association between violence viewing and aggression (controlling for this variable left the originally observed correlation coefficient virtually unchanged). The other variable, "parental interpretation of television violence," refers to "how often" parents "used to" indicate to their children that interpersonal violence in "western and crime shows" was unlike real life and an undesirable way of solving problems. Surprisingly, the relationship between violence viewing and aggression was found to be *higher* among youth whose parents *relatively often* engaged in such interpretation than it was among youths whose parents less often provided such interpretations. A tempting speculative explanation of this finding is that parents may be more likely to provide "interpretation" for youth who view a great deal of television violence, but the available data do not provide much evidence either for or against this supposition.[4]

Other aspects of parental attitudes and behavior investigated by McLeod et al. are more generic and thus are more logical candidates for common origin variables. Of these, the most fully treated are *"parental affection," "parental punishment," "parental emphasis on nonaggression,"* and *"family communication patterns."*

"Parental affection" was assessed in McLeod et al. (1971a) by respondents' replies to a single question ("How often do your parents . . .show that they love you?") and in McLeod et al. (1971b) by the combined answers of respondents and mothers[5] to that question and two others (". . . tell you they love you" and "show their affection by hugging and kissing you"). As so measured, "parental affection" was found to be essentially unrelated to violence viewing, to aggression, or to the relationship between them. Doubts may arise about the adequacy of the measure, and further inquiry, employing a more refined measure, is obviously desirable before "parental affection" can be regarded as unrelated to the phenomenon under investigation.

Parental punishment, including "restrictive punishment"

McLeod et al. employed a five-item index of parental punishment. A series of statistical operations, using their most refined measures, indicated that "parental punishment" and "violence viewing" were inde-

[4] "Parental interpretation of television violence" was found to be related to violence viewing at the approximate level of $r = .15$ in each of two pooled samples, and to be essentially unrelated to summed self- or other-reports of aggression (r's ranging from $-.03$ to .07).

[5] Appropriate pronoun substitutions were provided for mothers, e.g., ". . .tell him that you love him."

pendently related to aggression, and at almost the same level.[6] Parental punishment, as thus defined and measured, therefore cannot be regarded as a strong candidate for a common origin variable.

The same investigators, however, also separated components of the five-item "punishment scale" into measures of "physical punishment," "verbal punishment," and "restrictive punishment." The latter index was found to be significantly related to both violence viewing and aggression in two pooled samples. In one sample, "restrictive punishment" proved to be more strongly related to aggression, as measured by others' reports (.41) than was violence viewing (.17). The question thus arises whether "restrictive punishment" or some frustrating child rearing practice it manifests may be a common origin variable, but the available data unfortunately provide no basis for further inquiry.

Parental emphasis on nonaggression

Under this rubric, McLeod et al. inquired into the degree to which parents discouraged their children from being "mean to other kids," fighting back in self-defensive situations, doing "the bad things people do on television," and (in reference to one sample) behaving aggressively in hypothetical situations. Although this index was found to have only a trivial and generally negative relationship to *either* violence viewing *or* aggression (Chaffee and McLeod, 1971b), it was nevertheless found to be very strongly related to the relationship between violence viewing and aggression. Thus, the investigators report that "the average correlation (between violence viewing and all measures of aggression in both of the samples) is .26 in families where little stress is placed upon nonaggression; in families where such an emphasis is found, the average correlation is only .07."[7] Parental emphasis on nonaggression emerged as a strong candidate for a third variable. Where such emphasis is low, the relationship between violence viewing and aggression occurs; where it is high, the relationship is markedly reduced. This finding is consonant with the earlier mentioned finding of Dominick and Greenberg, to the effect that family attitudes regarding violence are more strongly related to aggressive attitudes than is violence viewing for fourth- to sixth-grade boys and girls. Taken together, the two findings strongly underscore the

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[6]Violence viewing correlated .26 with aggression, with "parental punishment" and "parental affection" simultaneously partialled out. "Parental punishment" correlated .20 with aggression, with violence viewing and "parental affection" simultaneously partialled out. The partial effect of "parental affection" was negligible (McLeod et al., 1971b).

[7]A decreased correlation in the presence of high parental emphasis on nonaggression, as compared to low parental emphasis on nonaggression, was furthermore observed in all but one of the eight sex-and-age subgroups, the single exception being senior high school boys in the Wisconsin sample. McLeod et al. (1971a) and McLeod et al. (1971b) confirm the direction of effect.

need for more extensive inquiry into the role which pertinent family attitudes play in the relationship between violence viewing and aggression.

Family communication patterns

For some years prior to the institution of the present research program, Chaffee, McLeod, and their colleagues had been studying various types of "habitual structure. . .of parent-to-child communication" (Chaffee and McLeod, 1971b). Partly before and partly within the present program, some of these investigators have examined the relationships between these patterns and media use and between these patterns and aggression.

The array of identified patterns is too complex to describe in any detail in this summary report. Suffice it here to say that two basic dimensions were identified and respectively labeled "socio-oriented" and "concept-oriented." The "socio-oriented" dimension involves "parents urging the child to keep discussions pleasant, avoid controversy, defer to his elders, and generally maintain harmony at the expense of his own ideas and opinions" (Chaffee and McLeod, 1971b). The "concept-oriented" dimension, in contrast, involves "encouraging the child to challenge parental beliefs, to reach his own conclusions. . . (and to be aware of) contrasting views on controversial issues." The investigators found that "about equal numbers of families stress either, neither, or both of these orientations."

It seems reasonable to suggest that emphasis upon the "socio-orientation" pattern would seem likely to engender considerable frustration in the child, whereas emphasis on "concept orientation" would seem likely to minimize frustration at least as regards child-parent communication.

McLeod et al. generally found relationships between these concepts and either violence viewing or aggression to be in the direction which the frustration hypothesis would suggest. Youth living under the presumably frustrating high "socio-orientation" patterns view significantly more violence than do those living under low "socio-orientation" patterns. With respect to self-reported aggressiveness, the highest scores are found under the presumably most frustrating conditions (high socio-orientation, low concept-orientation). With respect to both self-reported and other-reported aggressiveness, lowest scores are found under the presumably least frustrating conditions (high concept-orientation, low socio-orientation) [Chaffee and McLeod, 1971b].

The crucial question—whether these family communication patterns may be common origin third variables—can be answered only by testing the relationship between violence viewing and aggression within each of the four patterns. The question remains unanswered, and parent-child communication patterns remain viable but as yet unvalidated candidates for common origin third variables.

Summary: evidence for the common origin interpretation

The data in the studies here under review have been examined for evidence consonant with the interpretation that some antecedent condition or set of conditions (one or more "third variables") may produce both violence viewing and aggression, or may in some way explain the association noted between them.

Although we have been primarily interested in possible "common origin variables," we noted in passing some "interactive" third variables, which identified different population subgroups in which the relationship between violence viewing and aggression was variously stronger and weaker. The behavior of these interactive variables was found to be inconsistent across studies. *Socioeconomic status*, for example, was found to serve this function in one study, but not in another. *Sex* was found to serve such a function in at least three studies, but in diametrically opposite ways: in two studies the relationship was found to be as strong or stronger for girls than it was for boys, while in one virtually no relationship was found for girls.

Preexisting levels of aggression were found in one study (Robinson and Bachman) to operate in a manner consonant with the common origin interpretation, but unavoidable limitations of the data left in abeyance the question of whether or not they actually served such a role. *Personality factors*, or what might well be personality factors, were found in several studies to operate in a manner indicating the need for further investigation, but the data at hand were again deemed inadequate either to validate or to reject the candidacy of these factors for the role of common origin variables.

A number of variables relative to parental attitudes and behavior were examined. Two of these could be regarded only as manifestations of possible common origin candidates, but they were noted because of their direct bearing on television viewing and aggression. Of these, one, "*parental control over television viewing*," was found to bear no relationship to the association between violence viewing and aggression (McLeod et al.); the other, "*parental interpretation of television violence*," was found to be associated with high relationship between violence viewing and aggression (McLeod et al.), possibly because its occurrence might be a response to considerable such viewing on the part of young people.

Among more logical candidates for common origin variables, McLeod et al. (and for the most part only these investigators) examined a number of generic aspects of familial attitudes and behaviors. They found that "*parental affection*" was unrelated to violence viewing, to aggression, or to the relationship between them, but questions exist about the adequacy of this measure. "*Parental punishment*" was found by the same

investigators to be associated with both violence viewing and aggression, but its association with aggression was found to be independent of violence viewing, rather than to be the source of violence viewing.

"*Parental emphasis on nonaggression*" was found by McLeod et al. to be strongly related to the association between violence viewing and aggression, to the degree that the association was greatly reduced among youth whose parents strongly emphasized nonaggression. Related and supportive data were noted by Dominick and Greenberg, who found that family attitudes toward violence were more strongly related to aggressive attitudes in preadolescents than was violence viewing. Family attitudes toward aggression and violence thus remain a viable candidate for the role of a common origin, or controlling, variable.

Parent-child communication patterns were found by McLeod et al. to be strongly related to violence viewing and to aggression. Communication patterns presumably creating frustration were found to be strongly associated with high violence viewing and high aggression, while patterns presumably minimizing such frustration were found to be associated with low violence viewing and low aggression. Because the relationship of these patterns to the *association* between violence viewing and aggression has not yet been adequately investigated, these patterns can at present be regarded only as promising, but not validated, candidates for common origin variable status.

Thus, several candidate common origin or explanatory variables have been identified in the data. Several have failed to operate statistically in a manner consonant with common origin interpretations. Others have not been analyzed sufficiently to permit meaningful inferences about the possibility of their serving as common origin variables. At least two, "parental emphasis on nonaggression" and "family communication patterns," have operated in manners consonant with such an interpretation, but the pertinent data are as yet too limited to validate common origin status for either one.

The common origin interpretation remains viable, however, despite the fact that these variables, as defined by the scales employed, do not completely explain or nullify the observed relationships between violence viewing and aggression. Improved measures might change the picture, and so might the combination of several of these variables into a composite index of related conditions. Finally, and probably most important, necessary limitations of the studies at hand have left largely unexamined a considerable number of variables which have been found to be important or determining influences on other behaviors and attitudes. A continued examination of possible third variables is clearly indicated. Findings both in other areas and in these studies suggest that such investigation might profitably focus on personality factors and on aspects of family and peer attitudes and behaviors which are both more inclusive and more precise than those which have thus far been employed.

GENERAL SUMMARY

The research studies whose findings are reviewed in this chapter all report answers by adolescents, or in some cases by younger children, to questions presented in surveys. In general, the questions were designed to elicit data on exposure to television violence and on aggressive tendencies. The data were analyzed by the investigators to determine whether there was any relationship between such exposure and aggressive behavior.

Measures

One or more measures of television behavior and one or more measures of aggression were used in every study. The measures varied considerably.

Behavior in regard to television was variously measured by *time spent viewing*, by *preference for violent programs*, and by *amount of viewing of violent programs*. Pertinent findings suggest that the three are not equivalent measures for characterizing exposure to television violence. Under the circumstances, and lacking definitive tests, it seems reasonable to suppose that "amount of violence viewing" is the best measure of such exposure.

The measures of *aggression* differed along various dimensions and along a range within each dimension. Behavior reported upon differed in degree of reprehensibility, in degree of actuality (including, for example, actually accomplished behavior and projected behavior in hypothetical situations), in source (self-reports and others' reports), and in temporal reference (current and past). Pertinent data indicate a degree of communality among these measures, coupled with considerable differences between them. It is therefore important to inquire into what measures of aggression were involved in relationships found to be weak and what measures were involved in the obviously stronger relationships.

Findings

The several studies investigated the relationship between exposure to television violence and aggression, employing various measures to do so. Most of the relationships observed were positive, but most were also of low magnitude, attaining levels ranging from null relationships to .21. A few of the observed relationships, however, reached levels at or just above .30. These were the relationship between violence viewing and summary self-report aggression scores reported by McLeod et al. (.30 and .32), and the correlation of .31 reported by Lefkowitz between mothers' statements of boys' favorite programs at Grade 3 and peer-rated aggression of the boys ten years later.

On the basis of these findings, and taking into account their variety and their inconsistencies, we can tentatively conclude that there is a modest relationship between exposure to television violence and aggressive behavior or tendencies, as the latter are defined in the studies at hand. The question which must therefore be considered is what this relationship signifies. More specifically, (1) what is indicated by correlation at the .30 level, and (2) since correlation is not in itself a demonstration of *causal* relationship, what can be deduced from these data regarding causation?

The meaning of correlation coefficients and the basis of causal inference

Because the data of this chapter consist so largely of correlation coefficients, the meaning and limitations of this type of statistic must be kept in mind. As explained more fully within the chapter, a correlation coefficient of .30 may betoken any of several types of relationship, some of which do and some of which do not involve the majority of the individuals studied. We discussed "variance accountability" in Appendix E and cautioned against common misinterpretations of this technical term. Finally, we noted that positive correlation coefficients indicate that a relationship exists, but do not indicate whether that relationship is causal. In reference to the present topic, the correlation coefficients indicate that a modest relationship exists between violence viewing and some types of aggression. This relationship could conceivably manifest any or all of at least three causal sequences:

—that violence viewing leads to aggression;
—that aggression leads to violence viewing;
—that both violence viewing and aggression are products of a third variable or set of variables.

Evidence for the interpretation that violence viewing causes aggression

Within the studies reviewed in this chapter, all of which present correlational data, the two highest correlation coefficients (both at about the level of .30) involved correlations in which earlier viewing was correlated with later aggression ratings. In and of themselves, these data are supportive of the interpretation that viewing leads to aggression, within the parameters of a relationship at the .30 level; but certain technical questions exist regarding the adequacy of the measures. In addition the findings are equally consonant with a common origin interpretation in which both violence viewing and aggression are conceived to stem from an antecedent condition or set of conditions.

The data were examined for "plausible mechanisms" by which violence viewing might cause aggression, if that were in fact occurring. Three such possible mechanisms ("identification," "perceived learning of aggression," and "linkage to real life") were identified. All of these, however, are equally plausible components of a process in which some antecedent condition or conditions served as the common origin of both violence viewing and aggression.

Evidence for the common origin interpretation

The data in the several studies were examined for findings supportive of the common origin interpretation.

In the course of this examination, several "third variables" were noted. While neither explaining nor accounting for the relationship between violence viewing and aggression, these variables identified subgroups of the population in which that relationship was variously weaker and stronger. However, the findings in reference to these variables were not consistent across studies: in two studies, for example, the relationship between violence viewing and aggression was found to be as strong or stronger for girls than it was for boys, while in another study virtually no relationship was found for girls.

A number of candidate common origin variables were identified: preexisting levels of aggression, underlying personality factors, and a number of aspects of parental attitudes and behavior. Data on "family" variables related to parental control of television viewing, parental interpretation of television violence, parental affection, parental punishment, parental emphasis on nonaggression, and types of parent-child communication patterns.

Of this group of candidate common origin variables, several failed to operate statistically in a manner consonant with common origin interpretations. Others have not been analyzed sufficiently to permit meaningful inferences about the possibility that they are common origin variables. At least two, "parental emphasis on nonaggression" and "family communication patterns," have operated in ways consonant with such an interpretation, but the pertinent data are as yet too limited to validate common origin status for either one.

The common origin interpretation remains viable, however, despite the fact that the candidate variables here observed, and as here measured, do not completely explain or nullify the observed relationship between violence viewing and aggression. Improved measures, including indices which represent combinations of antecedent conditions, might possibly change the picture. In addition, there is need for further and more refined investigation of the role played by personality factors and by family and peer attitudes and behaviors.

Conclusion

The studies reviewed in this chapter indicate that a modest relationship exists between the viewing of violence on television and aggressive tendencies. Because all of the studies present correlational data, definitive conclusions about causal relationships cannot be drawn. The evidence reviewed here is consonant both with the interpretation that violence viewing leads to aggression to a limited degree and among a limited number of young people, and with the interpretation that both the viewing and the aggression are products of an as yet unidentified third variable. The data are also consonant with the interpretation that both these processes occur simultaneously.

Chapter 8

Current Knowledge and Questions for Future Research

In this brief closing chapter we shall try to do two things: draw together the evidence from laboratory studies of children's responses to filmed violence (reviewed in Chapter 6) with the evidence from field surveys of television viewing and aggressive behavior (reviewed in Chapter 7), and identify remaining gaps in knowledge which future research should address if we are to know with confidence what television viewing does to affect the development of children.

INDICATIONS FROM THE DATA

The best predictor of later aggressive tendencies in some studies is the existence of earlier aggressive tendencies, whose origins may lie in family and other environmental influences. Patterns of communication within the family and patterns of punishment of young children seem to relate, in ways that are as yet poorly understood, both to television viewing and to aggressive behavior. The possible role of mass media in very early acquisition of aggressive tendencies remains unknown. Future research should concentrate on the impact of media material on very young children.

While the data are by no means wholly consistent or conclusive, there is evidence that a modest relationship does exist between the viewing of

violence and aggressive behavior. The correlational evidence from field studies is amenable to either of two interpretations: that the viewing of violence causes the aggressive behavior, or that both the viewing and the aggression are joint products of some other common source. Several findings reviewed in Chapter 7 can be cited to sustain the hypothesis that viewing of violent television has a causal relation to aggressive behavior, though neither individually nor collectively are the findings conclusive. First, we note that, among the correlations of violence viewing with aggressive behavior, two of the strongest ones, on the order of .30, are between *earlier* viewing patterns and *later* aggressiveness; both of these findings, however, involve methodological problems and could be explained by operation of a "third variable" related to preexisting conditions.

Second, the experimental studies reviewed in Chapter 6 provide some additional evidence bearing on this issue. Those studies contain indications that, under certain limited conditions, television viewing may lead to an increase in aggressive behavior. The evidence is clearest in highly controlled laboratory studies and considerably weaker in studies conducted under more natural conditions. Although some questions have been raised as to whether the behavior observed in the laboratory studies can be called "aggressive" in the consensual sense of the term, the studies point to two mechanisms by which children might be led from watching television to aggressive behavior: the mechanism of imitation, which is well established as part of the behavioral repertoire of children in general; and the mechanism of incitement, which may apply only to those children who are predisposed to be susceptible to this influence. There is some evidence that incitement may follow nonviolent as well as violent materials, and that this incitement may lead to either prosocial or aggressive behavior, as determined by the opportunities offered in the experiment. However, the fact that some children behave more aggressively in experiments after seeing violent films is well established.

The experimental evidence does not suffer from the ambiguities that characterize the correlational data with regard to third variables, since children in the experiments are assigned in ways that attempt to control such variables. However, the experimental findings are weak in various ways, and not wholly consistent from one study to another. Nevertheless, they provide some suggestive evidence in favor of the interpretation that viewing violence on television is conducive to an increase in aggressive behavior, although it must be emphasized that the causal sequence is very likely applicable only to some children who are predisposed in this direction.

Thus, there is a convergence of the fairly substantial experimental evidence for *short-run* causation of aggression among some children by viewing violence on the screen and the much less certain evidence from field studies that extensive violence viewing precedes some *long-run*

manifestations of aggressive behavior. This convergence of the two types of evidence constitutes some preliminary indication of a causal relationship, but a good deal of research remains to be done before one can have confidence in these conclusions.

The field studies and the laboratory studies also converge on a number of further points.

First, there is evidence that any sequence by which viewing television violence causes aggressive behavior is most likely applicable only to some children who are predisposed in that direction. While imitative behavior is shown by most children in experiments on that mechanism of behavior, the mechanism of being incited to aggressive behavior by seeing violent films shows up in the behavior only of some children who were found in several experimental studies to be previously high in aggression. Likewise, the correlations found in the field studies between extensive viewing of violent material and acting in aggressive ways seem generally to depend on the behavior of a small proportion of the respondents, who were identified in some studies aas previously high in aggression.

Second, there are suggestions in both sets of studies that how children respond to violent film material is affected by the context in which it is presented. Such elements as parental explanations, the favorable or unfavorable outcome of the violence, and whether it is seen as fantasy or reality may make a difference. Generalizations about all violent content are likely to be misleading.

Thus, the two sets of findings converge in three respects: a preliminary and tentative indication of a causal relation between viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior; an indication that any such causal relation operates only on some children (who are predisposed to be aggressive); and an indication that it operates only in some environmental contexts. Such tentative and limited conclusions are not very satisfying. They represent substantially more knowledge than we had two years ago, but they leave many questions unanswered. We turn now to review the questions that still need answering.

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

The research reviewed here has uniformly been sharply focused on exposure to televised violence on the one hand, and on aggressive tendencies on the other. The narrowness of this focus is not surprising, but exposure to televised violence does not exist in a vacuum. The narrowness of concentration in these studies has severely hampered the interpretation of results. Some of the most important questions that this committee would like to answer are relegated to the realm of future research.

The research to date has whetted rather than satisfied our desire to increase our understanding of the complex psychological and social influences leading to antisocial tendencies. On the basis of the findings we have reviewed in this report, we recommend that future research concentrate in the following areas:

(1) *Television in the context of other mass media.* It is reasonable to expect that there is a positive relationship between an individual's use of television and his use of other mass media. As indicated earlier, when a stimulus exists in a constellation of highly related stimuli, any member of the constellation can, if studied in isolation, receive credit for the responses evoked by the entire constellation. So far, the attempts to isolate exposure to television have resulted in possible confounding of attribution.

(2) *Mass media in the context of the total environment, particularly the home environment.* If the analogy is not too far-fetched, we would recall that "high fever" is seldom if ever listed as a cause of death; yet if high fever were studied in the same isolated way that exposure to television has been studied, we might reach some startling conclusions. The importance of developmental history and social environmental context is emphasized in the testimony of Federal Communications Commission Chairman Dean Burch before the Subcommittee on Communications of the Senate Commerce Committee. On September 28, 1971, Chairman Burch posed the question: "To what extent does what the young viewer brings to the TV screen determine what he carries away—which is another way of asking where the television ranks among all the other aspects of a child's environment?"

Indeed, the studies reviewed in Chapter 6 suggest several specific directions for further exploring the relationship between television and aggression. First, identify the predispositional characteristics of those subgroups of children who display an increase in aggressive behavior in response to televised violence. Second, ascertain at what ages different reactions occur. Third, check on the moderating influence of labeling, contextual cues, and other factors under the control of television producers which may reduce the likelihood that predisposed children will react adversely to televised violence. Fourth, further investigate the possibility that content other than violent content may increase the likelihood of subsequent aggressiveness, the possibility that violent content may instigate other behavior besides aggressiveness, and the applicability of such findings to preschool children, youngsters, and adolescents. Finally, we must call attention once again to the gap in longitudinal research on the effects of television programs on children. This gap needs to be filled before we can learn something dependable about the long-term effects of repeated exposure to standard television fare on the personality development of the child.

(3) *Functional and dysfunctional aggressive behavior.* The lines which separate violence, hostility, aggression, and vigorous competition tend to become blurred in studies of the kind we have reviewed. Certainly, our society does not assign negative value to all these concepts; although traditional sex roles may be breaking down, there are few boys who are not taught to "stand up for your rights and defend yourself." There are those who argue that the realities of life require a certain set or readiness for aggressive behavior. The study of values, mores, and the realities of adaptation in this area would provide an important backdrop for our interest in media effects.

(4) *Modeling and imitation of prosocial behavior.* In our concentration on potential antisocial effects, we have seriously neglected any balancing effect that may occur. Perhaps this question ought to be more broadly stated as a cost-benefit problem, involving a balance between potential damage and potential benefit. In the current trend toward rejection of alleged overpermissiveness, are we risking a swing of the pendulum all the way to overprotection and overmanipulation? To state this position another way: we want children to climb trees, even though it would be easy to prove that tree climbing causes broken legs.

(5) *Teaching and learning of values about violence.* We have noted and deplored the paucity of research about the manner in which values with respect to many areas of behavior, including violence, are transmitted, and about the role played by television and other mass media in this communication. In the long run, societal values are shaped by a great variety of environmental forces and institutions; television programs may contribute a great deal or only a small amount to the process. It is conceivable that prolonged exposure of large populations to television violence may have very little immediate effect on the crime rate, but that such exposure may interact with other influences in the society to produce increased casualness about violence which permits citizens to regard with increased indifference actual suffering in their own or other societies, and to reflect that indifference in major political and economic decisions. Research may indicate that such fears are unfounded, but the research needs to be done.

(6) *Symbolic functions of violent conflict in fiction.* The experience of humanistic scholars suggests that, for adults at least, violent content in fiction is sometimes a vehicle for presenting to a general audience "messages" about important social and cultural issues. The authors and producers need not be fully aware that they are doing this. The Oedipus plays are perhaps the best-known example from the humanities. They have widely been held to be not merely "violence on stage," but also powerful statements in a symbolic medium about pervasive psychological or cultural conflicts. To suppose that plays about the tragic life of King Oedipus were significant to the early Greeks merely because people

liked stories about violence would be simplistic. It would likewise be far-fetched to accuse the Greek theater of inciting Greek warriors to repeated assaults on Troy by exposing them to episodes of meaningless violence.

There is a considerable body of literature on the symbolic meanings of primitive (and not-so-primitive) myths and legends, which often are extremely violent. Anthropological literature supports the contention that, whatever else it may do, such folk literature communicates conventional social values and moral standards, and also provides folk interpretations of the pervasive conflicts and problems of life in a given society at a particular point in its history. It would be desirable to look upon television drama and cartoon programs—crude as they may be—as folk literature in this sense. It would be important, in order more fully to understand the role of television in American life, to investigate the latent symbolic "messages" that even violent television plays and cartoons may convey over and above the content of individual scenes.

These are but a few examples of the kinds of research that have been discussed at meetings of the Advisory Committee; for the good reasons described earlier, little attention has been paid thus far to the contextual, developmental, and societal variables. It is our sincere hope that, as pertinent research continues, these more fundamental questions will be attacked.

Chapter 9

The Unfinished Agenda

The committee has not had an opportunity to process this chapter in the way in which it has dealt with the foregoing sections. Therefore, since we have not been able to subject this material to the same procedures of detailed review and discussion we have applied to the other chapters, the material to follow represents, to a greater extent than the foregoing, personal opinions and points of view rather than a formal position of the committee. However, the committee endorses the spirit and intent of these concerns as representing a significant broadening of the perspective of this report, and feels that even though they have been incompletely worked over by the group they should be made available to the readers of this report.

FURTHER NOTES ON COMMITTEE PROCESS

When a committee as diversely composed as this one embarks upon a project as global as studying and reporting upon "the effects of television violence on children," it will scout a vast terrain. Not all of the material and ideas encountered will be thoroughly explored, and at the end of its tenure many important issues will remain which have been less than fully examined. While the reasons for this uncompleted business are many, some of the ideas and observations we generated but did not fully develop are of sufficient importance to justify reporting them even in their less than fully considered condition. Also, a few additional comments are in order about the nature and the dynamics of our work and the psychological processes which determine partially the outcome of this and any committee's work.

We have remarked several times in earlier sections of this report that there is a conspicuous paucity of information about the influence of television on the psychological growth and development of young children.

One of the conclusions of our report notes the high probability that some factor (or factors) in early childhood experience substantially shapes the aggressive potentiality of most (or many) children, which may then be later influenced in any of several ways by the ongoing effects of violence viewing on television. This conclusion is no surprise to clinicians working in the psychotherapeutic professions; indeed, it would be an *a priori* hypothesis for most such persons. In the early and the ongoing discussions of this committee, this probability was frequently noted, and the strong recommendation to explore such a hypothesis was the subject of much committee discussion. Nevertheless, only a small proportion of our research focused on this crucial area. This fact is a reflection of the life history of this committee and the way in which it was organized and functioned.

When a committee like this is formed, it is usually under the aegis of some political body, such as Congress, which urgently desires an answer to some question far too complex for easy solution. Such committees are usually organized in haste, staffed under nearly emergency pressure, and sent upon their work mission with unrealistically short deadlines. Not surprisingly, the work product will usually be below expectations and less fruitful than a somewhat more deliberate course of action could have provided.

If asked to do so, the multidisciplinary experts who comprise the membership of this commitee could have rendered a sophisticated set of "expert opinions" on the effects of television violence on children, with no additional research work whatever. While their views would have lacked the reassuring quality lent by "hard" scientific research data, they still would have warranted substantial weight. We described in Chapter 1 the course which our committee followed. What alternative strategy might have been followed? Let us suggest a proposal for future projects which might make them potentially more valuable.

After an advisory committee for the project is selected, sufficient time should be allowed for it to involve itself in committee process and to explore adequately the multiple views of committee members. This would engender reasonably clear images of the kind of work which they wished to carry out. At that point in time and not before, the kind of staff selection and hiring should be carried out which would facilitate implementation of all of the committee's goals.

After a committee's research is completed and the results are in, the second important logistical need is to assure the committee adequate time to subject that data fully to the "committee process." There should be sufficient time to enable the committee to thrash out thoroughly the complex and controversial material they have obtained through their research, in the context of the various professional viewpoints represented in the committee membership. Such deliberation inevitably generates useful ideas which reflect the varied insights and skills of the sev-

eral disciplines. However, such a process is slow and very time-consuming. The necessary time for such a process has rarely been available to committees concerned with important public issues.

SOCIALIZATION AND REPRESSED BEHAVIOR: SOME RELATIONSHIPS TO TELEVISION

In order for human beings to live in social groups, group members must share their common interests, beliefs, and communication, and they must attempt to exclude from the group setting behavior which is disruptive to the group. Every social group makes value judgments about hostile behavior, sexual arousal, elimination of body wastes, disquieting excitement, and inadequate respect for group values, and when such things are defined as forbidden, they must be repressed and excluded from direct expression in the group by all who are mature enough to be socialized. Repressions of this kind constitute a part of the learning, conditioning, socializing, and acculturating processes experienced by every individual.

In sports, entertainment, and fine arts forms such as literature, drama, art, music, and dance, repressed group-disruptive impulses can be permitted expression within the group context in symbolic form. For this reason, among others, television viewers may be strongly attracted to content which portrays conflict and violence. The relationships between television viewers' interests and their repressed behavior have received very little attention in this committee's deliberations or in any other setting.

As we have noted in Chapter 4, persons making decisions about television program content, like all other people, may be largely unconscious of some psychological pressures, inside or outside their minds, which influence their behavior by inhibiting or reinforcing one pattern of judgment or another. By selection of content, by omission of content, or by minor distortion, all taking place on an unconscious basis, a news reporter can record what is in fact a "faithful" record of what he himself sees and hears, even though he may be much in error. The reporter's preexisting set programs his perception so that, literally, he tends to comprehend only that which fits what is already in his mind. Sensitive viewers may respond aggressively to underlying biases and prejudiced opinions which they might perceive in the content, even when the reporter is completely unaware of their existence.

Since the media compete with one another for the attention and involvement of the audience, they must choose emotionally involving content. The more emotion and conflict connected with an issue, the more newsworthy that issue is, and by the same token the more are false beliefs apt to be evoked in relation to it. Unconscious identification and

projection mechanisms from early childhood, as well as many vaguely conscious attitudes and interests which impute "good" and "right" to one's own views and "evil" and "wrong" to outsiders, may be important determinants of viewer responses to television content. It is quite possible that television can arouse unconscious responses in adults that can facilitate violent behavior much later in time. This possibility should be explored by appropriate research methods, including longitudinal case studies with psychoanalytic methodology.

ON OUR STEREOTYPES OF WHAT CONSTITUTES AN ADULT OR A CHILD

We generally discuss children and adults as if they functioned through simple, one-tracked systems, and fail to perceive mature reactions in children and immature reactions in adults. We do not often talk of "normal childishness"—that is, the child-parts of each person which remain throughout life, and which may come into dominance under certain circumstances every day. Television producers are generally aware of this emotional mix and cater to all of its parts in their competitive programming. Likely as not, if a person is deeply enjoying a program, some child-part of himself is much engaged emotionally, even while a more "mature" part, critical of that indulgence, may be encouraging attention to "more appropriate" interests and concerns. Viewed from this perspective, the committee might have included adults in its charge by formulating the question: What is the effect of televised violence upon the child-part of adult viewers? In this connection, both the Cantor and the Baldwin and Lewis papers note that sometimes producers respond to network pressures and networks give in to audience wishes, regardless of other judgmental considerations.

TELEVISION IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR NATIONAL ETHICS

In our quest for more ideal social structures, we have developed in the United States a basic philosophy and many laws which observe, honor, and seek to protect certain basic rights defined for all human beings. However, in the interpretation, administration, and living out of these philosophies and laws, we have employed sociopolitical processes which regularly favor and idealize some people while devaluing and neglecting others. Despite the aspirations for a more human society held by some of the founders of this country, the institution of slavery, racism, various forms of classism, and discrimination based upon sex also emerged.

The idealization of some persons and the denigration of others characterized this process. Even inequitable distribution of resources and power may be more palatable if each person's worth as a human being is acknowledged as equal to that of any other person. Affection and support for the social order, and trust and belief in it, are widespread and strong when this equal worth is reflected (1) in mutuality of consideration, (2) in equality of opportunity for health and liberty (as long as it does not infringe upon the health and liberty of others), and (3) in the equal application of laws to all individuals and groups. These desiderata have been sought after and partially achieved under various kinds of governments and in differently structured social orders from time to time, but never in any lasting way.

In the normal behavior of children with their parents, we can observe an example of this occurrence. Between the ages of three and seven, many children transiently select one parent as the preferred one with whom they are primarily affectionate, while the other parent may be renounced and related to in a competitive or aggressive way. The difference in the nature of the attachment does not reduce the importance or worth of either parent to these children, although there may be a clear preference to be with one parent rather than the other. Moreover, the children identify with, empathize with, and have some fondness for the parent toward whom there is a more competitive feeling. Although feelings tend to be split between the two parents and a preference developed, usually there is no dehumanization, and the object of aggression retains importance as a human being of equal worth and importance.

When people form groups and relate to one another as representatives of groups, affectionate feelings are freely directed toward members of one's own group, while aggressive feelings are easily diverted toward outsiders. However, when this happens, humanization of one's own group members and dehumanization of the outsiders is a frequent concomitant. Such dehumanization offers rationalization potential and also reduces associated guilt. This facilitates the exploitation, neglect, violence, or other aggressive behavior which may then be directed toward those outsiders. Any perception of these exploited victims as humans with whom we can identify, empathize, or feel fondness, increases our personal discomfort and reduces our freedom to exploit or do violence against them. These psychological factors are extremely relevant to televised violence, since whenever victims are devalued or dehumanized, violence toward them may become more acceptable or even endorsed.

Antisocial acts may occur among human beings from any group and from any walk of life, and within the context of tragedy and conflict they always do occur. Since special circumstances in the lives of some individuals or groups can reinforce antisocial behavior, it becomes important to identify and change those circumstances if we wish to alter that

kind of behavior. Whether presenting drama or news, it would therefore seem important for television decision-makers to convey, insofar as possible, the human contexts and conflict-filled human circumstances to engender, rather than discourage, humanitarian responses to the plight or behavior of other human beings.

Television should seek to avoid presenting any human beings as animal-like, without conscience, or without concern for the persons they care for or who care for them, since to do so endorses and facilitates the dehumanization and destruction of the victims of that treatment. Overt or subtle cues about the victims' characteristics may reinforce in the viewer's mind images which he identifies and dislikes in himself. He then represses, renounces, and imposes them upon some dehumanized outsider. Insofar as television presents victims with which viewers cannot identify and empathize, it may encourage viewers to accept and endorse violence as a simplistic solution to the conflict portrayed. Insofar as television more realistically presents both human beings and human conflicts in their complex human form rather than in simplistic dehumanized form, it could well offer opportunity for more full experience as a human being. While there might be less pleasure and more conflict, more humanity would be encouraged in viewers.

This view is not unique. In fact, it parallels a view expressed in the report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence on "Violence in Television Entertainment Programs." The Commission noted that the code of the National Association of Broadcasters prohibits the presentation of alarming and offensive material, including emphasis upon the pain, helplessness, despair, and uncomfortable conflicts in persons involved in violent interactions. Portraying the humanity of perpetrators and of victims in a manner which permits viewers to identify with and vicariously live through their experience is not often done. The Commission points out that part of this "sanitizing" process results in only rare portrayal of violent interactions between intimates, although this type of violence is actually quite common in real life. The hurts delivered to one's loved ones are seldom portrayed, while conflict between representatives of different groups is emphasized. The Commission report contained a speculation that if viewers were exposed to the horror and painful results of violence, it might sensitize them to their own potential for harming or being harmed.

A MORE HUMAN DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE

In order to define violence as realistically, as ethically, and with as much psychological accuracy as possible, the definition should be broadened to include the experience of its victims. Everyone who considers humanitarian values important should have concern about the experience of all persons who are physically or psychologically victimized or destroyed unnecessarily.

When deaths occur from air, water, or food pollution, or from unsafe drugs which have been authorized, or from defective mechanical equipment, the violent annihilation of human beings has been caused by the acts of other human beings. Also, the operation of a vehicle or factory, or the casting of a vote in Congress, or the signing of an executive order have only rarely been defined as violence, when such acts have had violent effects on a few or a multitude of persons.

The physical and psychological violence experienced under the circumstances just described may go unrecognized when violence is defined only in terms of the physical acts of perpetrators who are accountable. In situations where responsibility and accountability are unclear, it is essential to define violence in terms of the victims' experience if we are not to overlook or neglect the extensive misery experienced through such acts. When a society legislates and institutionalizes the definition of violence in terms of victims, then all violent experience becomes a matter of concern. When the definition reflects only accountable destructive behavior, much, if not most, violent experience may not even be acknowledged.

When accountability is divided among many people, it is easy for each individual person to avoid any sense of responsibility. When an action is taken by an organization, a company, or a bureaucracy, decision-making and action-taking may be so well rationalized and divided between many levels, departments, or individuals, in a maze of interlocking complexities, that individual responsibility and accountability are in some respects impossible to assign. Persons in a large organization may have no conscious awareness of its destructive effects nor of their own personal contributions to them. The mass violence and genocide administered to six million European Jews could only have been accomplished through such an institutional arrangement, with its own obscure individual accountability. Similarly, mass violence and slavery were imposed upon uncounted millions of Negroes in a nation where freedom and equality were valued. Such authorized and legitimized aggression is usually not even seen as violence, and sometimes efforts are made to define the perpetrators as intelligent people of good will who were merely doing their jobs according to their assignments under the laws and codes of their day.

The ease with which a definition can be used unwittingly to justify, to rationalize, or to obscure from our awareness vast amounts of violent experience is apparent. It seems very possible that television has great potential as a social force to modify progressively society's definition and awareness of violence. Clearly, this would necessitate a marked change in current practice, where it largely entertains and informs. When violent real-life experiences are televised, the audience is confronted with uncomfortable visual and auditory stimuli which must be interpreted and dealt with in some manner which can ultimately reduce discomfort. For that reason, the violence is often rationalized, justified,

or denied by the viewer, if perpetrated by people with whom he identifies. Violence arouses sadness, indignation, rage, and urges to retaliate or reform when it victimizes people with whom we identify. If it is overly painful, we may turn it off or campaign against the televised content which disturbes our complacency. Clearly, some of the violent content televised in newscasts during the 1960s evoked complicated responses of these kinds in viewers. Just as politicians believe in the value of television, so persons who wished to direct attention to some matter about which they were gravely concerned found that televised demonstrations and confrontations helped to produce the interest and excitement needed to attract attention. This attention and response on the part of persons sympathetic to the cause, as well as those antagonistic to the cause, enlarged the arena of confrontation, often to the point of creating a public issue. Television became one of the principal media, along with radio and newspapers, through which confrontations on issues could be portrayed in a manner which aroused widespread concern and interest.

It is a matter of record that the Civil Rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the early 1960s was based upon mutual love, respect, and consideration, equality of opportunity and correction of injustice in line with our most cherished national and religious ethics. Large numbers of blacks and whites sympathized with and supported this movement until 1965-66. Also at that time, many whites, who were stirred from their indifference and threatened as the integration movement gathered impetus, disrupted demonstrations and precipitated violent confrontations. The strength and influence of this "White Backlash" countermovement became one of the factors which partially neutralized the movement led by Dr. King, even as it mobilized others to join him. The size and intensity of confrontations, and the frequency with which violence occurred during them, converted the movement from one of hope into one of pain, failure, and despair. The integration movement progressively appeared to many as a nonviable political approach to the problems of black Americans in the face of white indifference on the one hand and "White Backlash" on the other. Such frustration and despair, fused with mounting impatience, fed into a countermovement of blacks referred to as the "Black Power Movement." Black ethnic group formation, with emphasis upon development of group integrity and strength to deal with the white strength opposing them, began to compete with integration as a goal. This polarization effect became an important factor in the ongoing struggle for integration, as well as the continued pressure for segregation. The swift passage of information about this swirl of conflicted emotions and ideologies can surely be attributed in large part to the communication efficiency of the television medium.

The development by blacks of forceful responses as a group when they perceived unjust force being used against a black person led to remarkably violent interactions between large numbers of whites and

blacks in 1966-68. These violent interactions, together with the violence of the war in Vietnam and a series of assassinations of leaders with integrative orientations, emphasized with clarity that the dynamics of power between polarized groups led only to more violence. Since 1968, integrative activity has been undertaken with renewed effort because further polarization seemed nonviable. Conflict between polarized groups has been contained and undermined by the invocation and organization of greater power to manage confrontations and other polarized situations. The dynamics and ethics of power continue to be operative between individuals and groups with conflicting interests, but they are modulated by stronger forces which manage conflict in our society. Conflicts between management and labor, men and women, whites and red people, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking people, educators and students, and the rich and the poor have been analogous to those between whites and blacks in their dynamics and central issues.

Television has been unparalleled as an instrument of mass communication in its capability for engaging the interests, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior both of the participants in telecasting and of viewers. The dynamic interplay of the forces involved in each important social issue can be readily observed in television news, dramatic, and entertainment content. Moreover, since television is perceived as an instrument with potentially powerful impact upon the outcome of social, political, and economic issues, it has become an instrument which individuals and groups seek to influence and manipulate in their own interests.

The excitement and entertainment potential of televised violence has engaged the attention of both viewers and programmers. This reality has become a "cause" for many, and has stimulated general concern. On the other hand, the discomfort of audiences and television programmers with the plight of victims and with injustice constitutes another reality that leaves us with a problem. It seems very possible that television could stimulate a more general awareness of the plight of many victims whose needs now go unattended. Moreover, if an orderly means were found for bringing attention to these victims, so that they might receive appropriate consideration and concerned response, it might be unnecessary for them to rely upon social conflict in order to get attention. Also, it should not be forgotten that when conflict is used to gain attention and interest, the underlying cause may go unattended as social concern is shifted and focused on management of the disruption. Since access to media also follows the dynamics of power and influence, it follows that by comparison most victims in society are relatively without power and without influence. How, then, can victims gain access to television and other media so that their plight may receive the attention and appropriate human concern which is their due?

Television entertainment may contribute to insensitivity. In such programs the primary victims seldom exhibit the repulsive physical consequences of violence, and the effects of such violence on secondary vic-